

3/3/20

Tao Te Ching Class Notes, verse 12

All versions of what Nitya calls “a highly mystical text” are similar, especially the first part, which amounts to:

The five colors blind our eyes
The five musical notes deafen the ears
The five tastes dull the palate

Then:

Racing, chasing, hunting,
drives people crazy (LG)

or

Madden the mind (F)

Trying to get rich
ties people in knots. (LG)

or

Precious things lead one astray (F)

Combined:

Thoughts weaken the mind.
Desires wither the heart. (Mit)

Therefore the sage is guided by what he feels and not by what he sees.

He lets go of that and chooses this. (F)

The literal versions finish with keeping to the gut (this) and resisting the eye (that). The idea is to adhere to your intuition, your gut instincts, rather than pursuing sensory will-o-the-wisps.

Karen wondered right off the bat about all the fives. Red Pine addresses this:

The early Chinese liked to divide everything into five basic states of existence. They distinguished things as made up of varying amounts of water, fire, wood, metal and earth. [Clever as they were, they missed air—RST] And each of these came with its corresponding color: blue, red, black, white, and yellow; its corresponding flavor: salty, bitter, sour, pungent, and sweet; and its corresponding tone: la, sol, mi, re, and do.

Charles just sent a dream about fives that I'll tuck into Part II.

In my Gita commentary I explore how “taste” can be symbolic of “preferences,” with the food you eat meaning what ideas you take in. It gives the subject a much broader application.

The advice of this verse seems quite drastic, but there are ways to interpret it that are much less so. Red Pine quotes Wu Ch'eng admitting that we can't help having sensory input, the mind can't help thinking and the body can't help acting: “They can't stay still. But if we let them move without leaving stillness behind, nothing can harm us.” So it's simple: we just have to maintain intimate contact with our own inner stillness.

When you lose the stillness, you meet rabid politicians, desperate consumers. The ferocious intentionality that seems to be necessary to live and thrive in the world is actually making life impossible. Possibly even literally impossible.

This touches an essential point, with which I opened the discussion in Deb's absence. The simplistic take on advice like this

is to simply screen out the senses, still the body and mind, and do as close to nothing as you can. Persisted in for a long time, it has the potential to open up new worlds of direct experience. It can certainly keep you busy for a long time, trying to stop the perpetual motion machine of your being. Yet you also miss pretty much everything.

Taoism is more inclined to severe denial than Vedanta, but even some of its sages weigh in on the fact that that is deleterious. What they agree is needed is to maintain balance in yourself while participating in and fully experiencing the world. The question becomes how do we live a full life while maintaining that equipoise. We have learned that happiness comes from within each person, that we must not keep returning to pleasurable values solely because we need them as the imaginary source of our well-being. Happiness or ananda is coming from within us, and that's where we want to nourish it.

Some forms of Vedanta, like the Gita's and the Gurukula version, are more active-friendly, where we try to discern and promote the real within our normal behavior. Happily, the latest section in our study group on the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad treats this very subject with finesse, and I've already typed up some highlights, which I recommend you read in Part II.

I suggested to the class that we could easily think of practical examples of how the senses dull our intelligence, but we never got around to it. I was thinking about the worldwide political turmoil and the Corvid 19 viral pandemic. You could easily add in other major issues, like climate disruption. All are subjects that can really upset us when we think about them, trying to postulate where they will lead. One inferior solution would be to pointedly ignore them and live in a fool's paradise. What is being proposed here and in Vedanta is to restrain the outgoing tendencies, the fears and projections, and adhere to the inner stillness, from where effective action is generated. Living in "what might happen" is an

anxiety-generating machine. Reminding ourselves where we are now, and having confidence in our beingness, is more a bliss- or calmness-generating condition. These are really good places to let go of “That” and choose “This.” We might even be able to do our part for a better world.

In Lao Tzu’s time, being blasted by hysterical input was probably fairly rare. In our time, every news outlet, political faction, interest group and identity advocate is filling our inbox, vying for our attention, making as much noise as possible to be overhead amid the cacophony. Solely within the factional chaos there is no way for us to distinguish valid, useful information from garbage. Only in the inner stillness can we attend to the still small voice of our intuitive wisdom. Well, okay, the best is an amalgam of inner and outer, but one is small and weak, the other is noisy and powerful. Taoism advocates attending to the less blatant side, letting the noise fend for itself.

Jan could see that the point here was similar to Vedanta, not being ruled by the world of the senses so we can find the ground of our deeper being. I asked her whether the first line clashed with the class she’s currently taking on color theory. She didn’t feel that way at all. Her class is on how to appreciate color differently, and how to connect with her own personal feelings about color, and it’s not saying we can’t explore things that excite us. She has found that studying color has helped her appreciate the world more — seeing color in the world more vividly.

Nataraja Guru was fascinated by the color solid (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Color_solid), and wrote about it as an analogue of the Absolute in ISOA. I’ve added a teaser for it in Part II.

Susan added that, just as Jan is trying to become a better painter, she is trying to become a better pianist. It includes an acceptance of improvement, development. I concurred that a measure of dissatisfaction is useful to keep us motivated, not to

mention humble. Whether there are any Taoist musicians or artists, there were and are definitely Taoist poets sipping wine all over the place. Of course, that the skill where you wait for inspiration to arrive all by itself, yet the wine does the same prompting.

Nancy put it in her inimitable unique way, that it's good to have a check, something to come back and center on so you don't go driving off the road if your mind wanders. You keep checking in with yourself. She added it would be a waste of her existence not to appreciate color and sound, to not let them drive her.

Of course, our class is "the chorus," definitely pro-experience. As Jan phrased it, we love the things that nourish us, and they allow us to be more vibrant so we can be there for other people, too. I agreed wholeheartedly that it is better to be ourselves than to spend our entire life trying to thwart who we are while searching for something really rare.

Meditations on the Way has a really excellent chapter this time, starting off addressing the color issue:

Guru asked Peter in what sense the five colors make man blind. Peter said, "There is an inner light, the radiance of which is far greater than that of the sun; but man becomes infatuated with the shapes and colors illuminated by the sun in the outer world and hence remains blind to or ignorant of the splendor within."

That class read out an excerpt from Narayana Guru, from his *One Hundred Verses of Self-Instruction* pertaining to Atmo 7:

Do not wake any more, and without sleeping remain as
Knowledge;
if you are unfit for this,
then steadily fix your embodied self in devotional service
to those great ones
who ever live free from birth, in silent contemplation,

awakened to *aum*.

Nitya's MOW class read out Nataraja Guru's commentary on it, and found it excellent:

One key sentence was, "People of active temperament, tuned to the horizontal world of action and caught in the love of particular objects of interest, cannot steady themselves in the pure contemplation of Absolute Value." (41)

Reading out Nitya's insights that followed was a big part of the class. Let me share the first part:

You can withdraw from the sights which attract you, the sounds that you like to listen to, and certain preferences for what pleases your palate, but you cannot withdraw from the necessity of taking nourishment or breathing. One set of activities and interests relates to the necessary aspect of life and the other set to what Nataraja Guru calls the contingent. One the one hand are the necessities of life in a body, and on the other there is the freedom of your soul.

In the Gita, Krishna says that nobody can remain for even a moment without performing action; at the very least you are breathing. Recognizing this absolutely necessary aspect of life, a sage has no other course but to accept it and attend to it. Where he is free to withdraw and improve himself, he does.

The mysticism of Taoism requires a certain state of mind which is not at all common. One is to remain neutrally poised between a number of opposing tendencies, just as in the above-quoted verse of Narayana Guru one is asked to neither wake to the world of gross actualities nor sleep away into lassitude, indifference or reverie. Such a vigilant state of equipoise and pure beingness is certainly not reached through the senses or

the calculating mind. An aspirant for mystical vision has to learn to rely more and more on intuition. Normally our thought is a piling of syllogisms on top of syllogisms. We think in terms of “If this, then therefore such and such. If that, then therefore so and so.” Intuition is more immediate: simply, “This is. It is clear. I see it.”

Normally when a person seeks to be initiated into a spiritual path, he comes with his own well-worn circles of thought. This is called *cinta*, the vicious circles or eddies through which the stream of a person’s consciousness flows. The first thing a guru will do is give certain directions to the student to direct their thought in a specified way, so as to meaningfully break out of the old patterns. Such “directed thought” is called *vicara*, reasoning. It may be analytical reasoning or, in the case of yoga, dialectical reasoning.

But to get into the mystical core of one’s self, one must let go of every kind of reasoning, be it analytical, dialectical, Aristotelian or whatever. One has to sink into the depth of one’s being. (42-3)

To do this, the student does not allow the mind to drift:

The mind is not accustomed to being contained within such a thin vertical line, but if it is kept from horizontalizing in either direction, it will inevitably sink to a great depth or burst forth in a high flash of insight.

There is a thread in spirituality of utter, complete renunciation, but the Gita and our splinter group prefer a modified version. Nitya concludes his exegesis acknowledging the rarity of thoroughgoing renunciation:

In order to get into the spirit of these verses, to tune into the mystical core indicated, one must be willing to let go of one's normal patterns of thought and activities and sit alone. There is a necessary period of psychic hibernation. This is not a waste of time. When a hen is sitting on an egg during its incubation period, much is going on within that egg which is hidden from sight. But all will manifest when the egg hatches. Like that, *manana* (unitive contemplation) will certainly bear its fruit. But if instead the incubation period is occupied only with *cinta* and *vicara* (circular thinking and reasoning), the egg will not hatch. It will go rotten, fit only to be thrown at a politician.

Yet I must say, in nearly thirty years in the Gurukula, I have not seen one person, with the exception of Nataraja Guru, capable of attaining this state. Each person has their own pet distractions and interests. (44)

Isn't it nice that the compassionate gurus have made room for us ordinary folks, and that there is much to be gained even from our half-hearted participation?

Our closing meditation was intensified by a brief poem by Tao Yuanming (365-427) found in the Minford edition. Like Ferdinand the Bull, my guiding star, Yuanming was "quietly content to 'pluck chrysanthemums by the eastern hedge, and gaze afar toward the southern hills.'"

Let go,
Float
On the Great Transformation
With neither Joy
Nor Fear.
When it's all over
It's over.
Brooding

Serves no purpose.

Part II

Beverley's haiku:

Her favorite:

Desire casts dust over
what is real, so put your trust
in the inner guide.

Two others:

The eye and the 'I'
lead us astray - so follow
your inner vision

Opinions cast dust
over what's real - best to
trust your gut feelings.

* * *

The highlights I've recorded so far from Nitya second volume of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad commentary include a section that sounds like he's participating in our Tao class right now. Notice how cheerfully he sweeps away confusing notions on this central issue. It's almost like having a bearded Babe Ruth sitting with us

in the dugout, the clean-up hitter ready to step up to the plate and smack a homer:

What is death? The non-Self is opposed to life. When you develop a hankering for the pleasures you expect to get from the non-Self such as love objects, you are allowing part of your self to be afflicted by the darkness and ignorance of the non-Self. That is one way of embracing death. When you withdraw your desire from anything which prevents you from ennobling the Self or being at one with the Self, you are opting to put the Self in the position of the non-Self. Inside you will grow bright and more in resonance with the Self. To that extent you transcend death. You need not force any mechanical renunciation upon yourself. While living in the body, the senses are like handmaids to you and the mind is like a trustworthy friend. Thus it is to your advantage to live physically and have enough opportunities to be a silent witness of your organism functioning as if it knows what it is and what is going on.

Both life and mind are simple if we do not complicate them. A river does not need to take extra care to flow over any land where it chances to be and ultimately reach the ocean. A river reaching its natural destination, the ocean, is symbolically the same as the self arriving at the Supreme or Absolute. (564)

If, in your poetic exuberance, you put on many festoons and make yourself so artificial that you are giving too much thought to body and mind, you give up most of the freedom of the person living in your body. (564)

The word 'all' is important. It is another term for the Absolute, *brahman*. When we shift from English vocabulary to Sanskrit words, some kind of strangeness or awe makes us less sure of our ability or faith in doing our best. The true spirit of life becomes

somehow hampered by a religious sense of awe. We are given all environmental facilities and the faculties of our organism so that we can carry out the purpose of our lives. It is hard to hold oneself in the preserve of the chalice of this body and feel alienated from others. On the other hand, if we allow ourselves to flow in all directions and get into natural harmony with others, that is already a sign of realization. Every moment should be a moment of living an exquisite value. Then that moment becomes real. When we allow habitual functioning with not much of our consciousness in it, we allow the unreal to percolate into our given moments. We have to understand the Vedantic concept of going into the purity of the Self or the Absolute as being something which comes as a natural consequence of living one's general interest. (564-5)

One who has transcended worldly obligations can remain passively seeing all that is in and around them. There is no need for them to take active steps to wring life out of their body or pretend to be an alien to those who are familiar to them. It is in that state we say that the realized person has become a *sarvabhutatma*. (565)

People speak of controlling the mind. It is like a person obsessed with a sense of sin getting into an encounter with an imaginary Satan and claiming they are gaining an edge over Satan. There is neither Satan nor sin if one does not make them with one's imagination. With your imagination you can make the whole world satanic and your whole life a torment for you and others. (565-6)

The body is “a perilous and perplexing place” for the Self to reside. (573)

No physicist has ever seen an atom, much less a subatomic particle. But, like religious people who make icons, the physicist has also made conventional models of atoms and particles. Any person who has gone to school and studied the model of the atom cannot be dissuaded from that mental picture. In this way even scientific knowledge becomes a matter of belief. The Upanishad sweeps away all images born of mind. That is why a true Vedantin can never be a religious person.

The human ego is like a medium out of which one can fashion commendable patterns as well as incoherent ideas. As a result, a person with a mind that has sense impressions registered in it which are colored with likes and dislikes is tempted to apply all the previous memories and preferences to current experiences. Patanjali thinks it is this so-called scientific certitude that stops a person from going into transcendence. (575)

As we are used to accomplishing things and obtaining desirable ends by our actions, we entertain the false impression that for the self to become *brahman* there has to be some kind of process by which the part can evolve into the whole. Mantras seventeen and eighteen remind us this is not so. We are always the whole. All that we need to do is forget the false notion that we are anything other than *brahman*. Realization is not accomplished by a forward march but by a regressive dissolution. Up to the last moment you have a choice to skip the whole process of samsara merely by accepting the fact that you are the Absolute. (583)

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Nataraja Guru has said, “The colour solid exists inside you.”

From *An Integrated Science of the Absolute*, (ISOA) Vol I. The third chapter addresses the third chapter of Narayana Guru's Darsanamala, which begins:

III. Asatya Darsana (A Vision of Nonexistence)

1. All this is a permeation of mind,
but mind is nowhere to be seen;
in the same way, like blue and so on in the sky,
the world is seen in the Self.

2. The Colour Solid and the Universal Concrete

Among the features of this chapter calling for special explanation is the one that comes into evidence in the very first verse. We have a reference in this verse to the colours blue, etc. The colourful world represented by our own refractory planet is only a convenient substitute for the larger universe extending infinitely and indefinitely in all directions. The visible aspect of outer space seems to have a blue colour. This blue colour cannot be distilled from the sky and possessed by us. It has the status of a kind of epiphenomenon, the origin of which is not altogether 'over there', but in the weakness inherent in our own power of sight. Modern science now permits such a two-sided view more and more. The redness of the cover of a book is not to be located in the book but in the peculiarities of the human retina.

The colour phenomenon has this double character referring to the subject and object at once, therefore it is not strange that Narayana Guru deals with the perfect reciprocity between subject and object in the phenomenon of visibility. He definitely says that although blueness is false and imagined in the sky, there is still a reciprocal counterpart of truth implicit when stated in correct

dialectical language. This makes the world a miniature colourful universe floating in the subjective vectorial and tensorial space of self-consciousness.

Colour, as in a rainbow for example or in the sunrise or sunset hours of twilight, does not generally belong to reality but is to be located more on the side of appearance. The neutral and normative standpoint taken by Narayana Guru is here evident from the fact that this phenomenal aspect of visible reality, instead of being unilaterally excluded, is included both subjectively and objectively and as worthy of being a sufficiently important subject for a complete Science of the Absolute. We have further to note that the first chapter of Darshana-Mālā starts from the possibly dreamlike physical world and passes on through less fine, thin and less fluid aspects of space and time relations, to reach by the tenth verse and in the second chapter a neutralized or normalized view. In the third chapter, a still more subtle and purer status is attained in the context of phenomenology, where subject and object meet more intimately without sacrificing inner or outer perceptive or eidetic experience. We shall continue to be in the world of existence until we enter into the fifth chapter, where the zero point is seen to be implied as a central and double limiting factor placed as it were back to back. These factors have already been explained in the Preliminaries and in Chapter 2.

The subjective colourful universe within the mind or the Self need not necessarily be imagined as having the same spatial limitations or horizontal structural peculiarities as its objective counterpart. Thought is free to construct its own relation-relata complexes helped by coordinates and in terms of relational new geometrical representations and parameters. The possibilities of such a representation have already been explored by us, taking account of the various distinct disciplines which reveal the same structural elements implicitly and uniformly seen through all of them and giving to them a scientific unity. (420-2)

—This is only an excerpt. Anyone interested in more from this work, please contact me.

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Part of Charles' dream about the five elements:

Subject: Five elements in Europe, India and China

I was dreaming this last night.re.Andy's waves and five elements graphic

Chinese calendar.Twelve animals times five elements

Same as our clock face ,twelve numbers plus five minutes per number

It's a great coincidence that the four elements I learned in my golden dawn period were waiting for me in India ,plus Akash.

Is this something protoendoeuropean or did it come over the Silk Road later.seems an obvious question

The earliest Greek philosophers were talking in terms of the elements

But in a fragmentary way.They were starting from scratch coming out of the barbarian invasions.whereas in contemporary India this was the time of the protobhagavadgita.Theory of the five elements solid and well worked since Years.

In China,five element theory well founded.China and India have always been distant neighbors.Aware that they had comparable versions...in my dream ,this was obvious.

Obvious that one didn't give it to the other.It was around from before.

The Chinese calendar is sexigesimal.Like Babylon and Egypt.Cant imagine they indepentently invented that number system or passed itback and forth,although there's nothing more imperishable and

portable than a number system.
Trying to remember...